

COMPUTERS/HILLEL SEGAL

Accounts tracker a cash-flow boon

An impressive accounts receivable program for personal computers called Collection Management System demonstrates the value of a specialized package over a multipurpose accounting program.

The dilemma faced by many software buyers is this: Do I buy a large, multipurpose program that has many layers of advanced capability that I may never use — and which is hard to set up and learn — or do I get a specialized program that's written for a particular need? Specialized programs are typically not very flexible, but are a piece of cake to set up and learn.

CMS costs \$395 plus \$8 shipping from Koch Software Industries of Arlington Heights, Ill. It is written for an accounts receivable secretary, accounting clerk or collection manager. Here are some of its features:

- Data base of customers and in-

voices. For each party that owes you money, a Customer File Screen is created with all the relevant details — contact names, addresses, telephone numbers, invoice amounts. As each contact is made, notes regarding the customer's response or promises made can be entered. This becomes an ongoing data base of information about your receivables. An extraordinary feature is that it allows notes regarding the collection process to be added to each record for easy reference.

- Automated collection letters. A word processing program with mail-merge capability is included, which allows standard letters to be sent to customers or clients in your data base.

- Monthly management reports. A highlight of the system is preprogrammed management reports that can be automatically generat-

ed, again using the information already entered in the data base. Included is a "hit list," bad debts report, cash inflow report, aging report and a invoice listing.

- Self-contained system. While the program can be run as a stand-alone accounts receivable system, by inputting all the data yourself into the data base, you have the choice of extracting certain data from selected accounting systems and having it read in automatically. Compatible accounting systems include Accounting Plus, CYMA, CertiFlex, Open Systems and Computer Associates.

On the negative side, CMS is primarily intended to be used by an individual, and it will duplicate much information that is already in the company's accounting records. It can easily fall out of balance unless that person is very careful and double checks his records against the regular accounting records every month.

Some data processing managers will argue that this weakness and

the resulting lack of accounting controls is so dangerous that such a system should not be used.

I disagree. The program is so much easier to use than most accounts receivable modules of standard accounting systems. It pays to use it even with the extra monthly effort to make sure the figures tie into the main system.

There is the danger, however, of replacing an adequate manual system with a fancy computerized one if you have too few records to make the effort worthwhile. For accounts receivable, a good rule of thumb is, "don't bother unless you have at least 100 invoices requiring collection follow-up each month." If you have a lot more than that number, don't delay — this system can save you money right away.

Hillel Segal is an independent computer consultant and author of the monthly Executive Computing Newsletter, published by the Association of Computer Users, P.O. Box 9003, Boulder 80301.



Segal